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## Research into the issues associated with people sleeping in waste containers

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# Research into the issues associated with people sleeping in waste containers

Reality Check  
series. Issue: 5

February 2020

Update on prior research  
issued in Feb 2014



Research conducted by



Supported by our Partner Organisations



St Mungo's  
Ending homelessness  
Rebuilding lives

Street  
Link

**Biffa**®

# Research into the issues associated with people sleeping in waste containers

February 2020

Update on prior research issued in February 2014

## About the Authors



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Catherine has an EngD in Environmental Engineering and her current research focuses on environmental issues around waste management.



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**Reality Check  
series.**

### **Further reading**

This report forms part of a growing series of position papers published by Biffa. The Reality Check series can be viewed and downloaded from: **[www.biffa.co.uk/publications](http://www.biffa.co.uk/publications)**

To request a printed copy of this report please contact:  
**[press@biffa.co.uk](mailto:press@biffa.co.uk)**



# Foreword



**The issue of people in bins remains as relevant and important as it did when we launched our first report in 2014.**

This is an issue that requires constant vigilance and we as a company are committed to continuous improvement of industry practices and those of our customers to prevent tragic and unnecessary injuries and fatalities. There needs to be a broader awareness of the dangers of seeking shelter in bins and the industry and its customers have an important role in spreading the word. This goes beyond standard waste management and reaches into our communities and social issues where we believe we also have a role to play. Our colleagues can connect rough sleepers to local advice and support to ensure that their needs are met in the most effective manner. Sadly, the numbers of homeless people have risen dramatically since our first report, making action in this area all the more urgent. We are committed to raising the profile of this issue in the industry and developing policies and procedures for widespread adoption to prevent further tragedies. We hope this report highlights the issues that we all need to address and acts as a call to action for the industry.

**Michael Topham**

Chief Executive Officer - Biffa

# Foreword from our Partner Organisations



## **Rough sleeping is harmful and dangerous for the individual and for our communities.**

Latest statistics show that 726 homeless people died while street homeless or in emergency accommodation in England and Wales in 2018. As this report notes, regrettably, homelessness and rough sleeping has risen drastically over the last decade. People dying while homeless is an absolute tragedy.

In that context, it is heartening that Biffa takes the issue of people rough sleeping in bins so seriously and is making recommendations across the waste industry to improve practice, policy and procedures. Terrible fatalities occur when people seek refuge in bins. We think it's unacceptable that people are forced to sleep rough in the first place but almost unthinkable that people are so desperate that they will seek refuge in bin containers. And some of the most vulnerable people in our society find themselves in this situation, facing not just homelessness but also mental and physical health issues, drug or alcohol problems, maybe long histories of neglect and abuse.

St Mungo's and Biffa know we need to do all we can to address this scandal and eliminate the risk of people dying in such conditions. We welcome Biffa's efforts and the recommendations in this report and thank them for taking a lead in the industry to educate staff, raise awareness and change practice. As a result, they have undoubtedly directly helped to save lives. Going forward, we recognise the importance of working together so that people in desperate situations can be found, helped and supported back into housing, good health and fulfilling lives.

### **Petra Salva OBE**

Criminal Justice and Migrant Services  
St Mungo's

## **The issue of people seeking shelter in bins continues to be a challenge for the resources and waste management sector and the risk is likely to grow as the number of homeless people sleeping rough rises.**

Recent figures from the Greater London Authority, for example, show that the number of new rough sleepers in London has increased by 50% in one year and many of these vulnerable members of society may seek shelter in a waste container. At the same time, there have also been some tragic accidents when individuals have taken refuge in waste containers after a night out.

Continuing to raise awareness and share good operational practice is, therefore, essential and as the professional body for the sector CIWM is very pleased to be involved as a partner with Biffa and the Open University in this useful research.

Building on the piece of work led by Biffa in 2014, it provides an up to date picture of the issue and showcases some of the measures responsible operators can take to help reduce the risks associated with people sleeping in bins and strengthen collaborative working with homeless charities.

### **Trevor Nicoll**

President  
Chartered Institution of Wastes Management



# Executive Summary

In 2014, the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management, waste management and recycling company Biffa and StreetLink, the national rough sleeping service, came together to carry out a study into people sleeping in bins following several near misses and, tragically, one fatality.

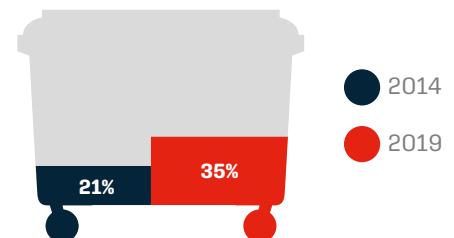
Five years on, this research has been repeated to determine the scale of the issue now, to assess how far the issue has progressed since the first report and to identify whether best practice is being adopted by waste producers and waste management companies. The intention was to also seek to set out a range of recommendations for the industry as a whole - and to determine how everyone involved can work better together to address the issue of people in bins.

Having completed this most recent research it is clear that:

## 1. This is a growing problem

**People sleeping in bins has become a bigger risk based on:**

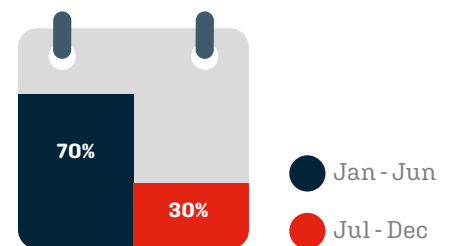
- an increasing number of homeless people in the UK (a 70% increase in the number of people sleeping rough since 2014), and;
- an increase in waste management companies encountering people sleeping in bins (35% of waste management companies encounter people sleeping in bins at least once per year (21% in 2014)).



**% of waste management companies that encountered people in bins at least once per annum**

## 2. This is a nationwide, year-round issue

70% of encounters occurred between January and June, with 30% in the remaining period. People sleeping in bins is not limited to the homeless community, some instances can be categorised as 'Revellers' - people who are not necessarily homeless but decide to seek temporary shelter after a night out.

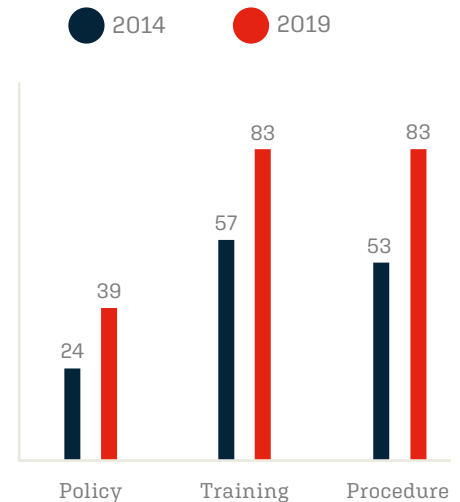


**% of total encounters by time of year**

### 3. Waste management companies are doing a better job, but...

**Since 2014, waste management companies have become better at dealing with this issue:**

- a. 39% have a policy in place (24% in 2014)
- b. 83% provide training (57% in 2014)
- c. 83% ask drivers / loaders to bang on bins (53% in 2014)



**% of waste management companies who have Policy, Training and Procedures in place**

### 4. More needs to be done

There is a long way to go and a lot more to do to prevent people using bins as a place of refuge. Preventing access to bins and educating waste producers and waste management companies is key to solving this issue. Reinforcing this point, the study identified that where people have been found in bins only 40% had a workable lock to prevent access (unchanged from 2014).



**% of bins with workable locks, when person encountered in that bin**

These findings portray an unacceptable set of circumstances which undoubtedly, can have severe and sometimes fatal consequences to life.

Positively impacting this issue will rely on the effective collaboration and engagement between waste producers, waste management companies, the general public and homelessness charities.

In response to this research, Biffa recommends key actions for waste producers, waste management companies, the general public and homelessness charities which combined can lead the change needed to ensure bins are never used as a place of refuge.



## The main recommendations of the study are:

### **Ensure training is provided to employees**

To ensure all waste producers and waste management companies have written policies and provide training to their employees related to the matter of preventing people sleeping in bins. In practice it is recommended that this is implemented by WISH Guidance Note 25 being updated and issued to all waste producers and waste management companies. This could be further helped by the HSE and Local Authorities promoting WISH Guidance Note 25 to all waste producers and waste management companies in their respective regions.

### **Ensure bins are locked**

Ensuring bins are fitted with a working lock and are locked at all times. If this is not practical, bins are to be stored in a secure locked area - not accessible to the general public. To meet this aim, it is recommended that all waste management companies reinforce the requirements of WISH Guidance Note 25.

### **Signpost the risks**

Stickers should be displayed on all bins to clearly communicate the specific hazard related to a human entering a waste container. The stickers should be

designed to visually communicate this risk, regardless of language and reading abilities of the risk group. To meet this aim, it is recommended that all waste management companies reinforce the requirements of WISH Guidance Note 25.

### **Engage with local charities through StreetLink**

Contacting homelessness charities if a homeless person is found in the vicinity of bins, and encouraging the public to do so if they see someone enter a bin. To meet this aim, it is recommended that waste producers, waste management companies and the general public use the StreetLink reporting system by calling 0300 500 0914, available 24 hours a day.

### **Report findings**

Waste management companies should establish internal reporting mechanisms for the capture and collation of encounters with a person near to or in a bin. To meet this aim, it is recommended WISH Guidance Note 25 is updated to include this requirement and is adopted by all waste management companies.

# Introduction

In 2014, Biffa sponsored a survey which was carried out by the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), to investigate the issue of people found in waste bins. This work was the first of its kind within the UK; and was extensively reported in the press as a result. The aim of this original study was to establish the scale of this issue; where these incidents have been occurring; and in what type of containers people are most commonly found. The research also set out to determine the level of awareness of this important matter within the waste industry, and to find out whether engagement policies and campaigns had been delivered both internally with employees and externally with customers.

The report produced as a result of this work in 2014 identified a worrying number of incidences of people found in bins, often sleeping in unlocked bins stored near buildings in urban areas. Five years on Biffa have sponsored follow-up work. This updated research was designed to establish the scale of the issue in the present day, to compare it with the previous report and to identify whether best practice is being adopted by the industry, and there is a new impetus to engage with this ongoing issue to prevent future incidences or accidents. The updated work repeats the 2014 survey, with some small edits, to collect new data and identify if there have been any changes in the past five years.

In this updated survey the largest waste management companies were targeted as were many of the larger SMEs and local authorities.

Concurrently with this survey the issue of homelessness was also compared between 2014 and the present day. Official government homelessness figures are collected separately for England, Scotland and Wales, based on a 'one-night snapshot'. In England 2,744 people were estimated to be sleeping rough in 2014 and 4,677 in 2018, a 70% increase (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2019). However, the UK statistics authority concluded that these statistics underestimate the scale of rough sleeping and fall short of 'trustworthiness, quality and value' (UK Statistics Authority 2015). Research undertaken by the homeless charity Crisis and Heriot-Watt University estimate that in 2017 12,300 people were rough sleeping across the UK (11,000 in England) at any one time compared to 7,250 in 2014 (Crisis 2018). The over-riding conclusion therefore is that homelessness has significantly increased since 2014.

Additionally, the waste sector itself faces many challenges. The waste industry has a significantly higher accident rate of 3.9% (industry average 1.9%) (Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 2018). Indeed, UK statistics for the past few years illustrate the issues the industry faces – headlines include 14 fatalities in 2015/16, with 5,000 workers being injured whilst at work and a further 6,000 workers suffering from a work-related illness (HSE 2018).



In fact, over the previous five years 39 workers have died whilst at work in the waste industry.

However there has been a positive response from the waste industry, where a forum has been formed, known as the Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum (WISH), a partnership between industry, public sector, NGOs and regulator (HSE) that provides the waste industry with practical guidance and information sheets and webinars, with a website ([wishforum.org.uk](http://wishforum.org.uk)). The guidance is formulated via a partnership between industry and academia, and the regulator. Waste 25, Managing access to large waste and recycling bins, was released by WISH (2010) in recognition of the issues of people sleeping in bins and will be reviewed, with the support of Biffa and WISH, once this research is concluded to ensure it remains up to date and relevant.

In terms of impacts on members of the public, there have been 7 confirmed work-related fatalities to members of the public in bins over the five years 2013/14-2017/18 in HSE and Local Authority enforced premises, of which 4 occurred in 2014/15 and 3 in 2017/18 (data obtained from the HSE in 2019). These include both incidences with the homeless<sup>1</sup>

and revellers<sup>2</sup>. The issue is not solely one within the UK, and incidences can also be found internationally in the press<sup>3,4</sup>.

In the context of the above, this research was designed to revisit the issue of people in bins, re-examine the underlying causes and to review future steps. It is also the intention of this research to drive up performance in key areas including:

- **Raising awareness of the dangers of seeking shelter in bins**
- **Improve practices in the industry and by the customer to help avoid injuries and death**
- **Help waste management operatives to connect rough sleepers to local advice and support**

By commissioning this research, the waste industry, with the sponsorship of Biffa as one of the largest companies in the sector and support from CIWM, have demonstrated a proactive attitude to health and safety and how importantly they take their health and safety leadership role. However, waste management companies are at the end of a very long chain of events, and there is a need for waste producers to engage with the industry to ensure that all involved make a positive contribution to a safer society.

1 <https://www.mrw.co.uk/latest/man-died-after-sleeping-in-waste-bin/10042244.article>

2 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-45715965>

3 <https://www.citynews1130.com/2019/11/24/family-victoria-homeless-man-found-dead-bin-call-mandatory-locks/>

4 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6858789/Man-52-dead-falling-asleep-inside-bin-cardboard-recycling-plant.html>

# Case studies

## Retailer in Cardiff

**Date:** 25th May 2018 **Time discovered:** 23.00 **Container type:** 1100 litre DMR

Philip Carling works in Cardiff and has been a driver for Biffa for 16 years. A year ago, Philip was collecting waste from a high street stationery store. Following industry procedure, he flipped the lid on a bin to check it was clear of people and it appeared to only contain a few pieces of cardboard. However, when he began to pull the bin towards the truck, he noticed the bin felt much heavier than it should. He opened the bin and moved the cardboard to find a man asleep underneath.

In this case, it was Philip's years of experience that meant he recognised the weight of the bin not feeling right and saved the man being tipped into the truck and suffering potentially catastrophic consequences.



Above: Actual photograph taken at the time of the incident.

## Takeaway in Middlesbrough

**Date:** 11th November 2019 **Time discovered:** 06.05 **Container type:** 1100 litre DMR

Eric has worked for Biffa for the last three years. Early one morning, Eric was doing his rounds collecting DMR waste in Middlesbrough. He was loading a bin from a pizza takeaway on to a truck when he noticed a man inside the bin. After helping the man out, Eric tipped the rubbish and put the bin back where it was kept – only for the man to attempt to get back into the bin, saying he needed to sleep.

This incident shows that vulnerable individuals may still try to take shelter in bins even after a near miss with danger, demonstrating the need for a holistic approach to prevent this.



# Methodology

This research is via an online questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire was first released in 2014 where it was distributed to councils and waste management companies. The questionnaire was designed to gauge the scale of the issue of people sleeping in waste containers and to identify the circumstances in which they are most commonly discovered, and the types of containers involved. This research re-uses the original questionnaire with some small but important changes. Changes included the addition of an open question inviting respondents to share their experiences in more detail. This has helped us to understand current best practice and the guidelines companies follow around this issue. In contrast to 2014 multiple responses were also permitted for questions 6-16 allowing for more than one incident to be reported.

The survey was placed online using the Jisc online survey tool ([www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk](http://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk)). Jisc Online Surveys is widely used by universities and public bodies to design, distribute and analyse surveys. The survey consisted of 18 questions which took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The full survey is available in Appendix. The questionnaire was available online for 8 weeks and

was publicised extensively in the waste management press, e.g. via an online newsletter available to CIWM members<sup>5</sup>, in Letsrecycle<sup>6</sup>, as well as other sources<sup>7,8</sup>. In addition the questionnaire was widely publicised through the CIWM website<sup>5</sup>, social media and other relevant websites including WISH. The Environmental Services Association (ESA) also publicised the survey directly to their members, as did the Local Authority Waste Safety (LAWS) group. The questionnaire was anonymous, but respondents were given the option to provide contact details for follow-up work.

To understand the potential change to the number of people sheltering in bins homelessness data was compiled from official government statistics which are based on a count or estimate by local authorities in England during a single night in the autumn (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2019). Independent research carried out by Crisis and Herriot-Watt University used secondary data sources and triangulation methods to model likely numbers of rough sleepers (Crisis 2017; Crisis 2018).

A review of the industry size and shape between 2014 and the present day was also carried out, to try and ascertain the representativeness of the 2014 survey compared to the present-day survey.

5 [https://www.ciwm.co.uk/ciwm/news/2018/new\\_collaborative\\_research\\_looks\\_again\\_at\\_issue\\_of\\_people\\_sleeping\\_in\\_bins\\_as\\_homeless\\_figures\\_rise.aspx](https://www.ciwm.co.uk/ciwm/news/2018/new_collaborative_research_looks_again_at_issue_of_people_sleeping_in_bins_as_homeless_figures_rise.aspx)

6 <https://www.letsrecycle.com/news/latest-news/updated-research-to-look-at-sleepers-in-bins/>

7 <https://resource.co/article/new-research-address-issue-people-sleeping-bins>

8 <http://www.recyclingwasteworld.co.uk/news/new-research-launched-into-preventing-people-from-sleeping-in-bins/218567/>



# Results

The questionnaire received 57 completed responses from organisations operating in the UK (a further four partial starts were discarded). Of these 18 companies left contact information which included 10 local authorities and 8 waste management companies. The report has captured a significant number of the larger employers with 22 respondents having over 500 staff.

In the last 12 months 15 organisations reported finding people in bins of which only 8 had a formal written policy for tackling people sleeping in bins.

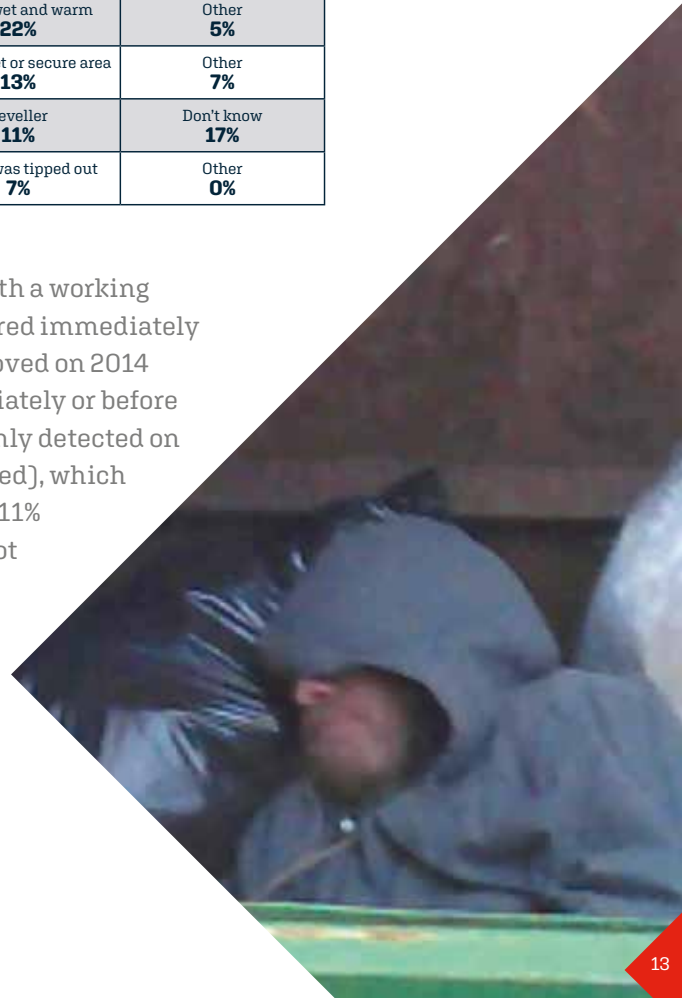
The typical scenario for an incident was found to be:

- **A closed container (83%)**
- **In an urban, semi-urban or suburban area (100%)**
- **During dawn, dusk or night (69%)**
- **During cold weather (73%)**
- **In a bin to the rear or side of a premises (80%)**

These responses are summarised in the table below:

Category	Common Factors		
Container type %	Closed Container <b>83%</b>	Open Container <b>0%</b>	Other <b>17%</b>
Location %	Urban <b>67%</b>	Semi-urban or suburban <b>33%</b>	Other <b>0%</b>
Time %	Dawn, dusk or night <b>69%</b>	Day <b>31%</b>	Other <b>0%</b>
Weather %	Dry or wet and cold <b>73%</b>	Dry or wet and warm <b>22%</b>	Other <b>5%</b>
Bin location %	Rear or side of premises <b>80%</b>	Main street or secure area <b>13%</b>	Other <b>7%</b>
Type of person discovered %	Rough sleeper <b>72%</b>	Reveller <b>11%</b>	Don't know <b>17%</b>
How close to being tipped %	Discovered before bin loaded <b>93%</b>	Person was tipped out <b>7%</b>	Other <b>0%</b>

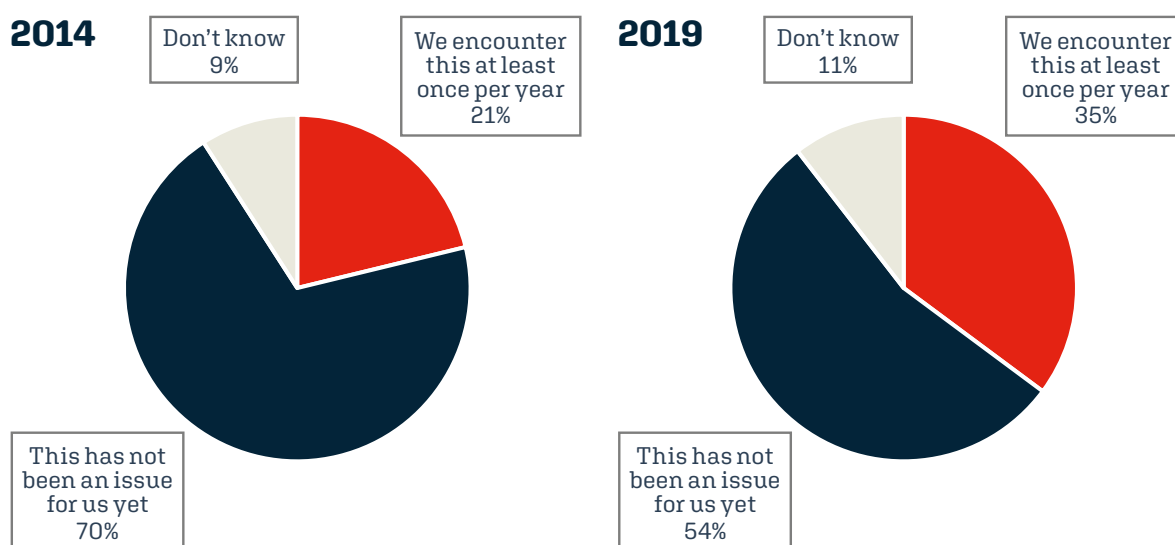
In addition, in 40% of cases the bin was fitted with a working lock and in 93% of cases the person was discovered immediately or before the bin was loaded. This is much improved on 2014 when only 61% of cases were discovered immediately or before the bin was loaded. This means that 39% were only detected on lifting of the bin in 2014 (16% of which were tipped), which has dropped to 7% in 2019. It is also notable that 11% (and possibly more) were revellers, hence it is not only an issue for the homeless.



# Questions, Responses and Summaries

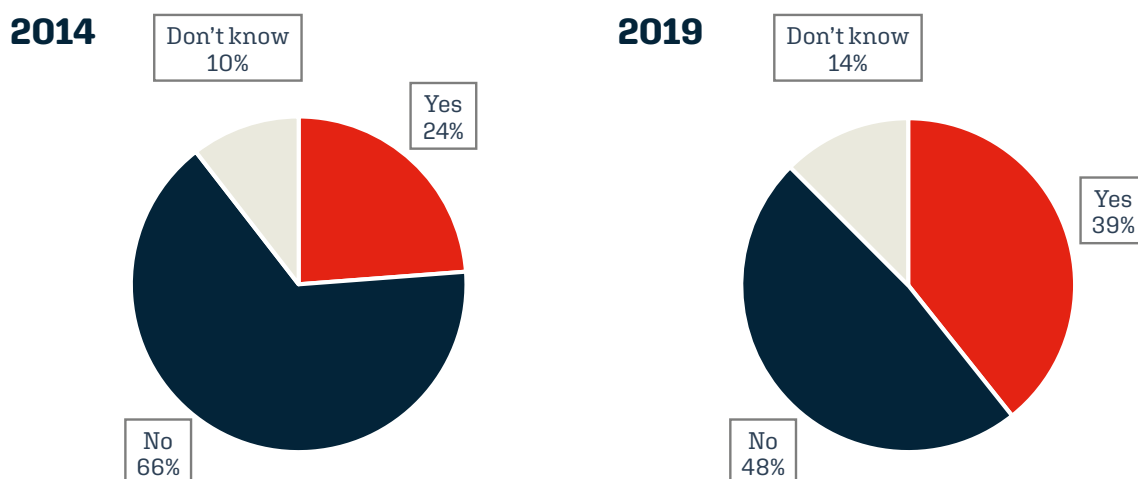
## 1. To what extent does your organisation encounter people sleeping in bins/waste containers?

More than 35% of respondents reported encountering people sleeping in waste containers at least once a year. Compared to 2014 when 70% of respondents had not encountered people sleeping in waste containers only 54% respondents had not found this to be an issue yet in 2019.



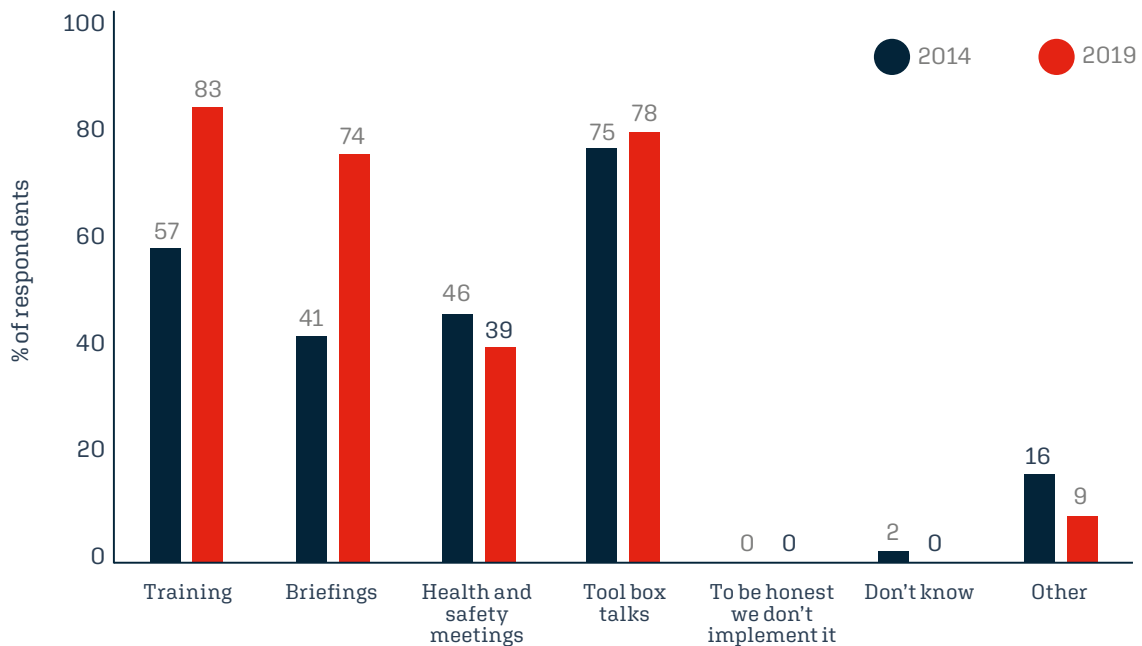
## 2. Do you have a formal written policy for tackling the issue of people sleeping in bins/waste containers?

39% of respondents reported having a policy in place compared to only 24% in 2014. Respondents who have no encounters people sleeping in bins yet or have reported very few incidents are less likely to have a formal written policy. One company reported encountering people sleeping in bins daily but had no formal written policy and kept no records.



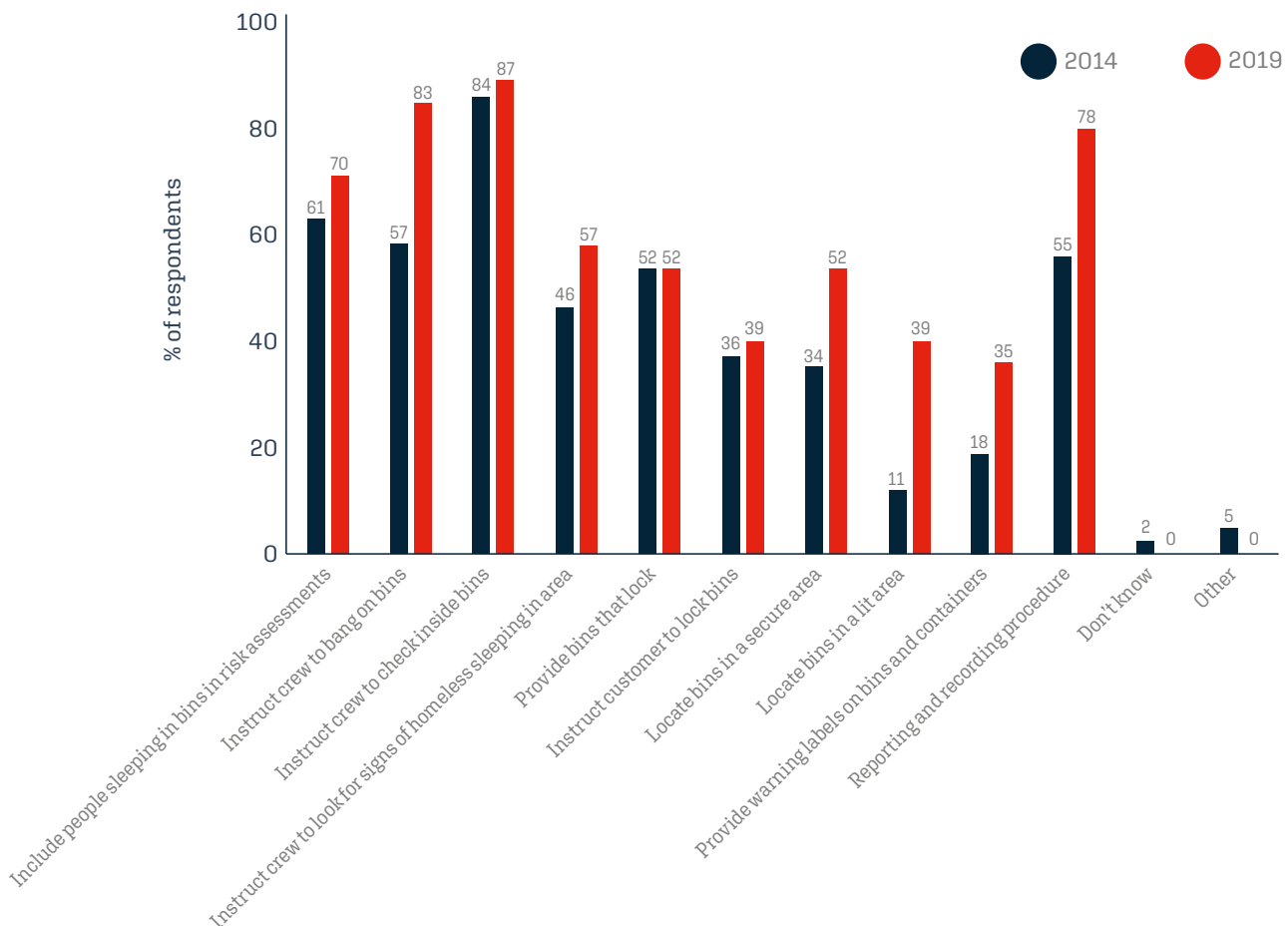
### 3. How do you ensure that employees implement your policy?

Similarly, to 2014 toolbox talks (78%) and training (83%) were the most common form of policy implementation. This was closely followed by briefings (74%) and health and safety meetings (39%). Other forms of implementation included safety alerts and use of posters on notice boards. All respondents who stated they had a policy reported at least one form of implementation.



### 4. Which of the following measures does your policy include?

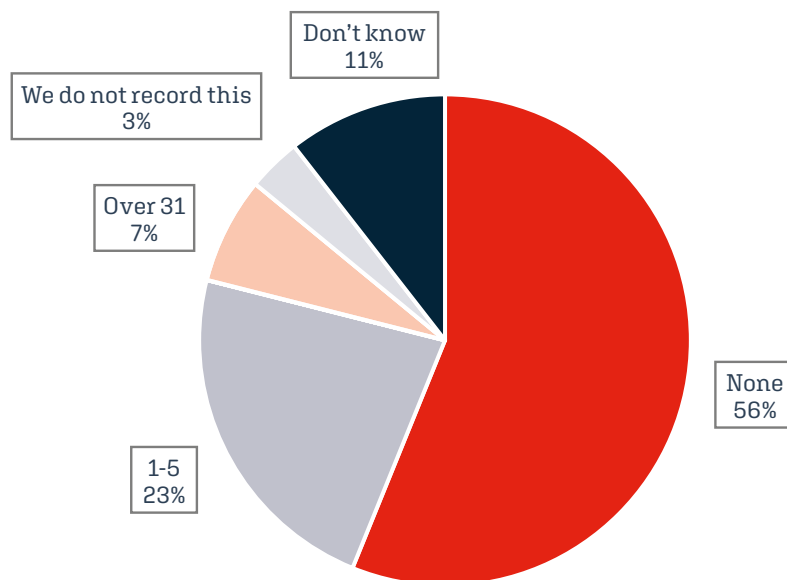
There appears to be good progress around different policy measures to try and reduce incidences of people sleeping in bins. Most measures were included on more policies in the 2019 survey with an increase in banging on bins (83%) and reporting and recording procedures (78%).



## 5. Over the last 12 months how many incidents of finding a person in a bin has your organisation encountered?

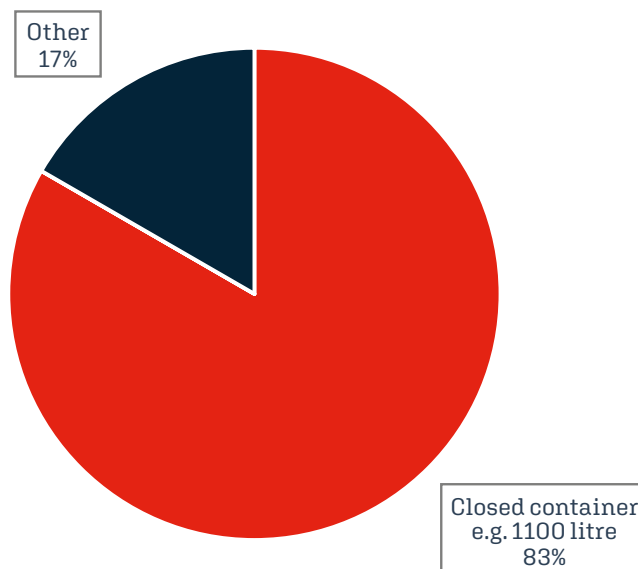
In 2019 56% of respondents reported no incidents compared to 72% in 2014. 23% reported 1-5 incidents compared to 14% in 2014 and two companies reported more than 31 incidents. There does not appear to be an increase in reporting with 7% stating they do not record this data compared with 3.5% in 2014.

A formal written policy does not appear to be reducing the number of incidents, of the 22 organisations who have a written policy 7 reported 1-5 incidents over the last 12 months and one had over 31 incidents. Having a policy does appear to lead to better reporting with no one selecting “we do not record this” when they also reported having a formal policy. For the 34 organisations who do not have a formal policy or selected “don’t know”, 4 organisations do not record incidents of encountering people in bins and 6 organisations had between 1 and 5 incidents over the last 12 months.



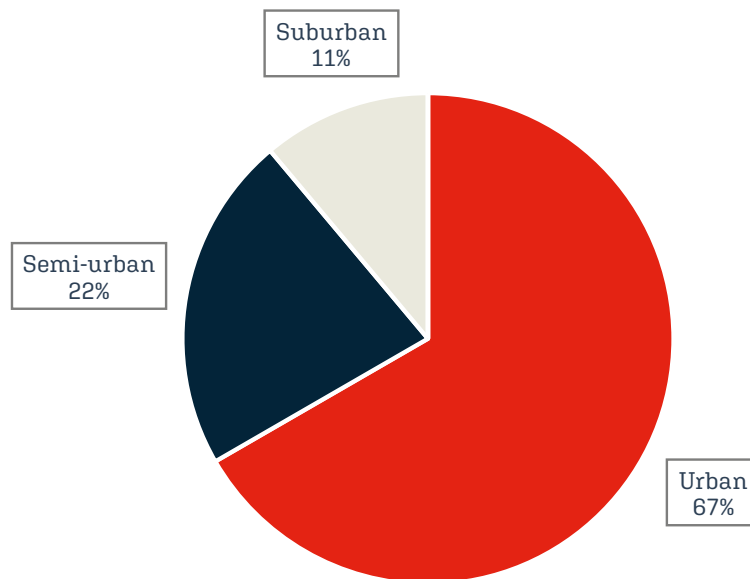
## 6. What type of bin/waste container was involved?

All the organisations reporting incidents had at least one incident involving a closed container. Other responses included an open 1100 container, a combination of 1100 L and FEL containers and closed 8yd containers (FEL). A similar response was received in 2014 with closed containers most likely to have a person inside.



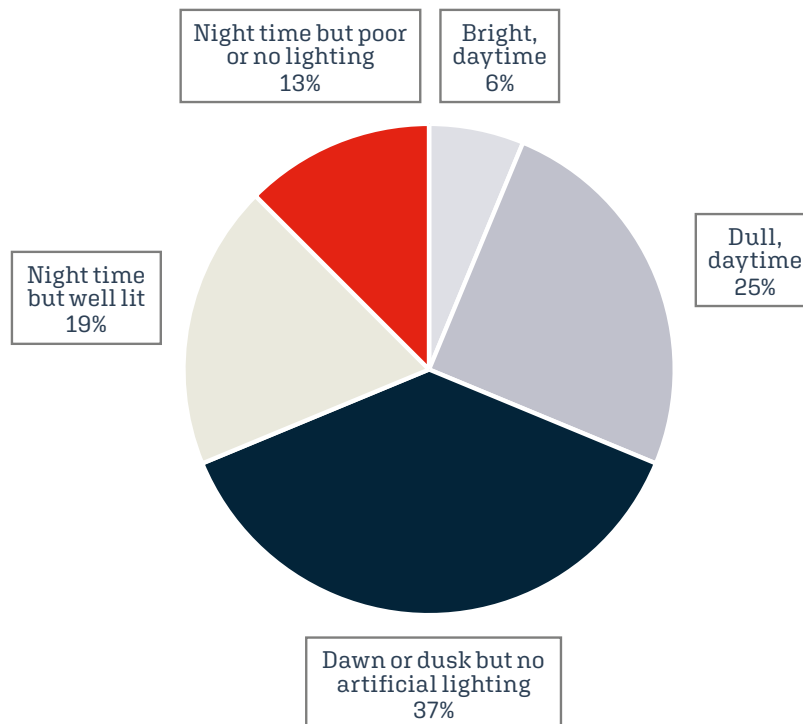
## 7. Was the location urban or rural?

Most incidents occurred in urban locations [67%] with other incidents occurring in semi-urban and suburban areas. This is similar to 2014 where many of the incidents occurred in urban or semi-urban areas.



## 8. Was it dark or light?

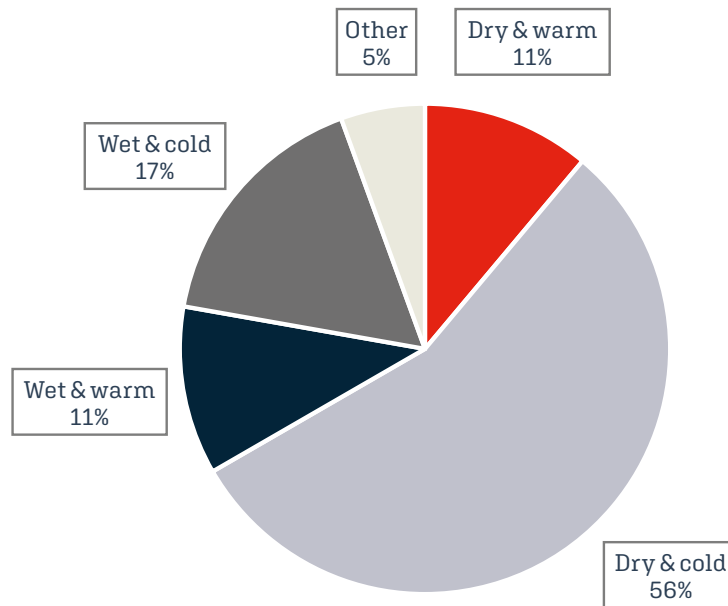
Most of the incidents occurred at night, dawn or dusk or during dull weather.





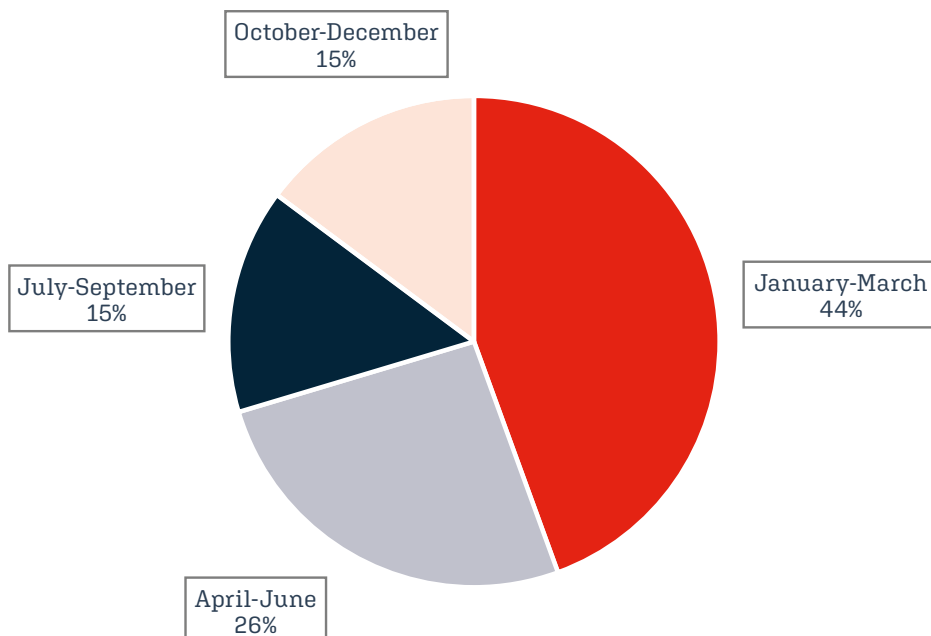
### 9. What were the weather conditions at the time?

Most of the incidents occurred during cold weather [67%]. One respondent reported that “weather does not seem to be an influence.”



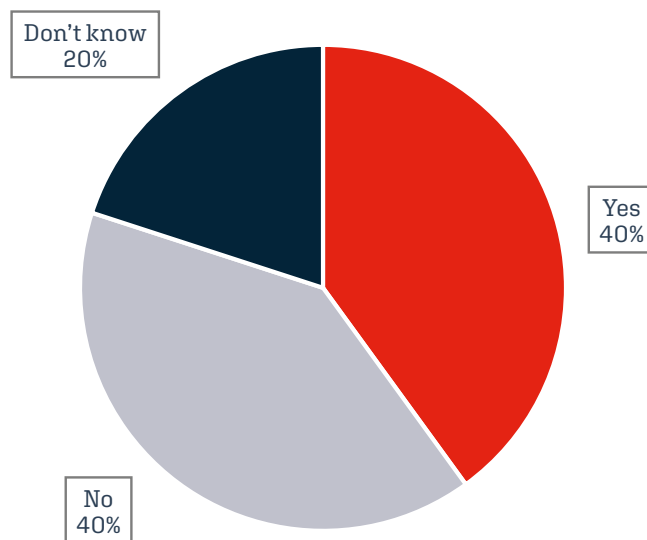
### 10. In what month did the incident(s) occur?

Most incidents occurred in January - June [70%]. This contrasts with 2014 when most incidents occurred October - March [63%]. Both surveys used the same date/month ranges.



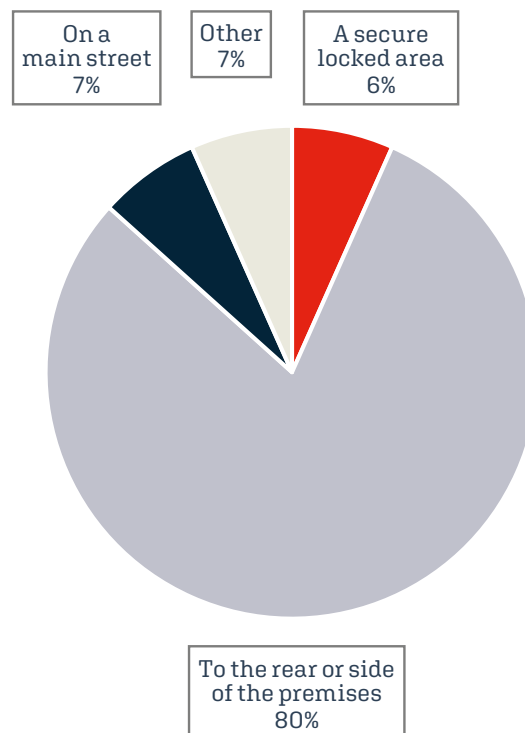
### 11. Was the bin fitted with a working lock?

A similar proportion of bins were fitted with a working lock as in 2014 (40%) indicating this overall has not changed since 2014, despite being recommended by WISH 25.



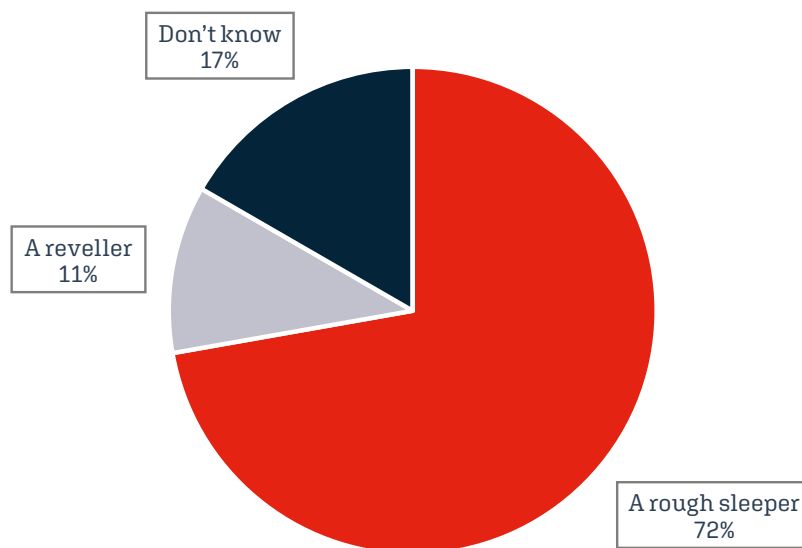
### 12. Where was the bin located?

Most of the incidents (80%) occurred in bins located to the rear or side of the premises. One incident occurred in a bin chamber on an estate. Again, this is similar to 2014 where 73% of incidents were reported to the side or rear of the premises.



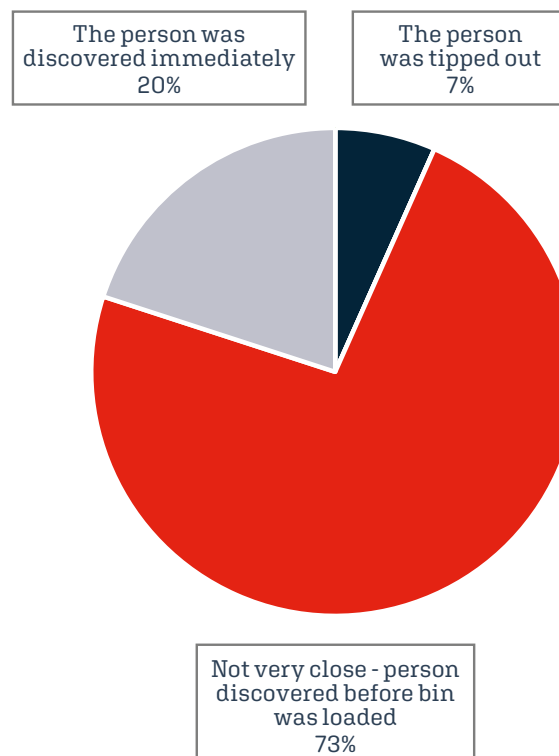
### 13. What type of person was discovered?

Most people in bins were identified as rough sleepers (72%).



### 14. How close did the crew come to tipping the sleeper?

In 93% of cases in 2019 the person was discovered before the bin was loaded indicating that policies around checking bins, banging on bins etc before loading were having an effect. Only one organisation reported that someone was tipped out and no one reported a case of the bin being lifted or even loaded before the person was discovered. This is an improvement on 2014 when 5 organisations reported tipping a person out and in only 61% of cases the person was discovered immediately or before the bin was loaded.



### **15. What type of waste does your organisation collect?**

Most of the respondents collected commercial or municipal/ household waste. Commercial and municipal/ household operators were more likely to encounter people in bins with 13 incidents reported in the last 12 months and 4 commercial respondents who don't record this information. Several respondents collected more than one type of waste. Other waste types represented in the survey include garden waste, bring sites and hazardous and liquid wastes.

### **16. Where does your business operate?**

Respondents were from across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Most of the responses (86%) were from organisations operating in England.

### **17. How many employees does your organisation have?**

Several larger organisations were represented in this survey with 39% of respondents (22 companies) having over 500 employees. This is the same proportion as the 2014 study.

It is estimated over 80,000 people work in waste management worth £11bn in the UK (ESA 2018). This is much smaller than other industries often compared to waste such as construction (2,230,000) or agriculture, forestry and fishing (411,000) (Statistica 2018). Accurate numbers of jobs in the sector are difficult to formulate because statistically they are collected as 'water supply, sewage, waste & remediation activities' which shows a total employment of 201,000 in 2018. Unfortunately, it's not possible to accurately split these categories. Another anomaly is the waste scrap sector is included in the retail figures and not this category.

The survey also does not give us information regarding whether all employees are exclusively employed in the waste sector, for instance a local authority might report over 500 workers, but in fact have far fewer than that number in waste management work. For these reasons it is not possible to accurately ascertain the 'coverage' of the survey in either 2014 or the present day from these figures. However, from the 18 respondents that left contact details it is possible to determine that the largest waste management companies participated, which represent 4.8 billion pounds turnover, more than double the next 15 companies (Waster 2017). Some of the larger well-known SMEs were also represented as were several local authorities. In 2014 the industry was somewhat more fragmented, since then there has been significant consolidation within the industry, with between 38 to 50 mergers and acquisitions per annum between 2014 to 2018 (Grant Thornton 2018). It is also possible in 2014 some of the larger companies responded regionally, whereas this time the responses were more co-ordinated from head offices. Based on this information and estimates of turnover the responses are likely to have covered around half the industry. Hence it is considered that the survey in 2019 is a good representation of the industry, despite there being fewer actual responses than 2014.

### **18. Do you have any other comments or experiences you would like to tell us about?**

A range of comments were recorded which are shown in Q18 of Appendix. Of note is the experience one company has had of a fatality when tipping, and another who actively engage with a homelessness charity to manage the issue.



# Conclusions

The 2019 survey recorded fewer responses than the 2014 survey, however due to consolidation, coordinated responses and from those responses it can be ascertained that it has a good coverage of the industry, likely around half of total turnover.

Homeless figures have risen since 2014, representing several thousand more people sleeping rough on the streets. The waste industry is effectively on the front line regarding this issue, dealing with people sleeping in or near to bins, and removing items from bins.

Many waste management companies have a formal written policy in place to deal with the issue of finding people sleeping in bins. There is an increased awareness of the issue in the waste industry, however, the survey also points to the fact that a formal written policy is not always in place even if the waste management company is having regular incidents of finding people sleeping in waste containers.

The types of containers, the location, the weather and the time of collection continue to be important factors when people are found sheltering in bins. These factors are likely to be difficult to control so awareness of staff to the conditions that are most likely to lead to a person being found is important. Therefore, continuing to highlight the following precautions is good practice:

- **Instruct crews to check inside bins**
- **When checking inside bins, drivers and crews should call into the bin**
- **Include people sleeping in bins in risk assessment**
- **Instruct crew to bang on bins**
- **Update reporting and recording procedure**
- **Provide bins that lock**
- **Instruct customer (and crew) to lock bin**
- **Instruct crew to look for signs of homeless sleepers**
- **Locate bins in a secure area**
- **Provide warning labels on bins**
- **Locate bins in a lit area**
- **Alert homeless services if they find someone sleeping rough**

One notable change that could be made is providing bins that lock as only half of respondents selected this option as a policy measure, the same as in 2014 and less than 40% of organisations instruct their customers to lock the bins. It appears that fitting bins with working locks and telling customers to use them is an important step the waste management sector and waste producers could take to reduce incidents. There are clearly areas in which waste management companies can improve their practices.

However, it appears there have been fewer serious incidents with fewer people being tipped or nearly tipped in the updated survey compared to 2014. This might point to a greater awareness of the issue in the industry, or it may be that those companies with a good awareness are the ones that responded to the survey. There are still fatalities reported every year to the HSE of people sleeping in bins, including some high-profile cases involving revellers. Whilst access can be made to a bin it is likely that there will always be a few cases per annum, with some having a fatal outcome.



# Recommendations

Clearly the waste industry cannot solve the homelessness issue and are effectively on the front line when dealing with people who are sleeping rough. Hence, they can only implement policies and procedures to try and deal with the encounters they have.

From the survey and associated research, it is clear various actions can be taken by the waste producer (or customer), and waste management company (or contractor). For both groups the following recommendations are made:

## **For the waste producer/customer:**

- Ensuring bins are secure, locked, and inaccessible
- Accompanying locks with infographic signage designed to suit the range of languages and reading abilities of the risk group
- Contacting homelessness charities if a rough sleeper is found in the vicinity of the bins
- Establish a reporting mechanism internally when sleepers are found

## **For the waste management company/collection contractor:**

- Every waste company that collects bins capable of containing a rough sleeper should have a formal written policy even if it is not yet an issue
- Educating staff, particularly drivers is a priority to ensure people are not tipped
- Ensure drivers and crews are inducted on bin checking and incident reporting procedures
- Provision of working locks on bins or compounds
- Procedures and warning labels on all bins to help staff follow policies
- Establish an internal reporting procedure where people are found in bins to identify high risk areas
- Drivers PDA's should be used to store local knowledge relating to customer sites known to be popular amongst rough sleepers etc. This will give drivers prior knowledge to use to their advantage when collecting and checking bins and heighten Driver awareness to hotspots
- Where feasible, engage with local homelessness charities to try and raise awareness of the issue

There are obvious opportunities for partnership working. For instance, collectors and producers could engage further with Homeless Charity Partners concerning education that bins are never a safe place of refuge and the potential outcomes of entering a bin. The general public could also be advised to report the issue if they see evidence of people potentially using a bin for shelter (via Streetlink or similar) or indeed if they see anyone entering a bin, giving precise information relating to the container location, time etc. This might entail a campaign where it is made clear bins are not a risk-free place to spend the night.



However, the retail industry also needs to engage with the waste industry to work together on this troubling issue, to ensure people cannot gain access to bins. Once a person has entered a bin, the risk of an adverse outcome is significant. This is not always in the power of the collection agent to control; hence a partnership approach is urgently needed with the waste industry on this important issue.

A revision of WISH 25 as part of the WISH Guidance is also recommended, ideally in partnership with waste producers, as work towards an agreed industry standard. A new draft of WISH 25 could include agreed signage suitable for bins to warn potential sleepers of the dangers. This could be further helped by the HSE and Local Authorities promoting WISH Guidance Note 25 to all waste producers and waste management companies in their respective regions.

Finally, it remains important for homelessness charities to continue to raise awareness about the danger of sheltering in bins and promote alternatives. The waste industry and producers need to engage with the homelessness charity sector and to develop partnerships to help the people they find and to prevent reoccurrence. The waste industry could help publicise StreetLink through their platforms, helping further to educate the public and build awareness of the service. It would be beneficial to do this within the report as requested but also to consider how this could be achieved on a larger scale.

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# Appendix

## Q1 To what extent does your organisation encounter people sleeping in bins/waste containers?

	Response %	Response Count
We encounter this daily	1.8	1
We encounter this weekly	3.5	2
We encounter this monthly	1.8	1
We encounter this every few months	15.8	9
We encounter this about once per year	12.3	7
This has not been an issue for us yet	54.4	31
Don't know	10.5	6

## Q2 Do you have a formal written policy for tackling the issue of people sleeping in bins/waste containers?

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	39.3	22
No	48.2	27
Don't know	12.5	7

## Q3 How do you ensure that employees implement your policy?

	Response %	Response Count
Training	83	19
Briefings	74	17
Health and safety meetings	39	9
Tool box talks	78	18
To be honest we do not implement it	0	0
Don't know	0	0
Other	9	2
Safety Alerts are issued		
Posters on all notice boards		

## Q4 Which of the following measures does your policy include?\*

	Response %	Response Count
Include people sleeping in bins in risk assessments	70	16
Instruct crew to bang on bins	83	19
Instruct crew to check inside bins	87	20
Instruct crew to look for signs of homeless sleeping in area	57	13
Provide bins that lock	52	12
Instruct customer to lock bins	39	9
Locate bins in a secure area	52	12
Locate bins in a lit area	39	9
Provide warning labels on bins and containers	35	8
Reporting and recording procedure	78	18
Don't know	0	0
Other	0	0

## Q5 Thinking back over the last 12 months, how many incidents of finding a person in a bin has your organisation encountered?

	Response %	Response Count
None	56	32
1 - 5	23	13
6 - 10	0	0
11 - 20	0	0
21 - 30	0	0
over 31	4	4
We do not record this	7	2
Don't know	11	6

\*Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option [e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option]

**Q6 What type of bin/waste container was involved?\***

	Response %	Response Count
Closed container e.g. 1100 litre	100	15
Open container e.g. builders skip	0	0
Other	20	3
A combination of 1100 litre and FEL containers		
Closed 8yd containers (FEL)		
Open 1100		

**Q7 Was the location urban or rural?\***

	Response %	Response Count
Urban	80	12
Semi-urban	26.7	4
Suburban	13.3	2
Semi-rural	0	0
Rural	0	0

**Q8 Was it dark or light?\***

	Response %	Response Count
Bright, day time	7.7	1
Dull, day time	30.8	4
Dawn or dusk but no artificial lighting	46.2	6
Night time but well lit	23.1	3
Night time but poor or no lighting	15.4	2

**Q9 What were weather conditions at the time?\***

	Response %	Response Count
Dry and warm	15.4	2
Dry and cold	76.9	10
Wet and warm	15.4	2
Wet and cold	23.1	3
Other	7.7	1
The weather does not seem to be an influence		

**Q10 In what month did the incident(s) occur?\***

	Response %	Response Count
January - March	80	12
April - June	46.7	7
July - September	26.7	4
October - December	26.7	4

**Q11 Was the bin fitted with a working lock?\***

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	42.9	6
No	42.9	6
Don't know	21.4	3

**Q12 Where was the bin located?\***

	Response %	Response Count
A secure locked area	7.1	1
To the rear or side of premises	85.7	12
On a main street	7.1	1
Other	7.1	1
Bin chambers on estates		





**Q13 What type of person was discovered?\***

	Response %	Response Count
A rough sleeper	86.7	13
A reveller	13.3	2
Don't know	20	3
Other	0	0

\*Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option [e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option]

**Q14 How close did the crew come to tipping the sleeper? \***

	Response %	Response Count
The person was tipped out	7.1	1
Very close – bin lifted but not actually tipped	0	0
Quite close – bin loaded but not lifted	0	0
Not very close – person was discovered before bin loaded	78.6	11
The person was discovered immediately	21.4	3
Other	0	0

**Q15 What type of waste does your organisation collect?\*** Please select all relevant types

	Response %	Response Count
Commercial	71.9	41
Industrial	22.8	13
Municipal/household	80.7	46
Other	5.3	3
Garden waste		
Bring sites		
Hazardous and liquid wastes		

**Q16 Where does your business operate?\***


	Response %	Response Count
England	86	49
Wales	15.8	9
Northern Ireland	3.5	2
Scotland	15.8	9
Republic of Ireland	3.5	2
Other	0	0

**Q17 How many employees does your organisation have?**

Please include part time and agency staff.

	Response %	Response Count
1 - 5	3.5	2
6 - 10	0	0
11 - 50	1.8	1
51 - 100	10.5	6
101 - 250	22.8	13
251 - 500	22.8	13
Over 500	38.6	22

\*Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option [e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option]



**“ People using bins as a place of refuge is all year round. Be conscious that during prolonged cold weather councils may open up overnight shelters, the risk of people being found in a bin increases once the cold snap ends ”**

**Q18 Do you have any other comments or experiences you would like to tell us about?**

"Our organisation has what we believe to be a robust approach to people in bins, with the issue included within risk assessments, safe working procedures and crew monitoring. There are tool box talks and safety alerts relating to the issue, and we believe that our staff are well informed in relation to the issue."

"We are a sack collection authority."

"We collect household refuse and recycling in bags only."

"We check before lifting eurobins for safety haz waste etc or people."

"We only collect 240L wheelie bins (food waste) so have not experienced any rough sleeper issues. However, we have had people attempting to break into locked bins to remove food waste - presumably to eat?"

"The local authority officers now stipulate use of new forest locks on 660 - 1280L bins in fly tipping, high recycling contamination and vagrant activity 'hot spots'."

"People using bins as a place of refuge is all year round. Be conscious that during prolonged cold weather councils may open up overnight shelters, the risk of people being found in a bin increases once the cold snap ends."

"Educating customers and staff training has to be a key factor to prevent this."

"We have an ongoing campaign with a local homelessness charity, where we warn about the dangers of sleeping in bins. Our drivers also record where they've seen rough sleepers on their rounds and this is reported back to the charity. Outreach workers from the charity have also joined our drivers and crews to give them extra knowledge."

"This has certainly made me think."

"We have carried out a campaign published in lets recycle following the HSE guidance on people sleeping in trade waste bins including procedures and warning labels on all of our bins."

"We have encountered people/individuals sleeping in communal bin store areas, not actually inside bins."

"This problem has been around for over 40 years. Rough sleepers know that enclosed bins provide a warm shelter for them to sleep in and it doesn't take the brain of Britain to work out a policy for alerting them to the fact that the bin that they're in is going to be serviced."

"Over 4 years ago the previous Waste operator experienced a fatality due to a sleeper in bin. Our workers still have memory of this."

# Notes

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## How can you help?

If you are concerned about someone sleeping rough, anywhere in the UK, we would urge people to get in touch with **StreetLink**. If you think someone sleeping rough requires medical attention, **call 999**.



Connecting rough sleepers to local services  
**0300 500 0914 [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk)**

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